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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

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ATTACHMENT

November 4, 1981

MEMORANDUM FOR THE VICE PRESIDENT
THE SECRETARY OF STATE
THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
THE COUNSELLOR TO THE PRESIDENT
THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE
THE UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE TO THE UNITED NATIONS
THE CHIEF OF STAFF TO THE PRESIDENT
THE DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF TO THE PRESIDENT
THE CHAIRMAN, JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF
THE DIRECTOR, ARMS CONTROL AND DISARMAMENT AGENCY

SUBJECT: National Security Planning Group Meeting

The President will chair a National Security Planning Group meeting in the Cabinet Room of the White House on Thursday, November 5, 1981 from 4:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. (60 minutes). The agenda will be as follows:

(1) TNF Negotiations: Zero Option

(2) Caribbean Strategy

Papers for agenda item (1) are attached. Papers for item (2) will be distributed separately.

FOR THE PRESIDENT:

Richard V. Allen
Assistant to the President
for National Security Affairs

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Review on November 4, 1982

October 20, 1981

SUBJECT TNF Negotiations: Zero Option

This memorandum proposes that the United States open the November 30 TNF negotiations by proposing a draft treaty that would mark a dramatic departure from the ideas of the previous Administration and could capture the imagination of NATO and indeed, the world.

The context of the negotiations:

There is little argument with the proposition that we would not enter into the TNF negotiations today if we had not agreed to do so when NATO decided, in December 1979, to pursue the "two tracks" of the TNF modernization and arms control negotiations. The context of the negotiations could hardly be less favorable: the Soviets already have a modern TNF deployment vastly larger and more capable than the modest program we seek now to build. The Soviet weapons are already deployed and continue to enter service at a rapid pace. Ours are still in development and the plans for their eventual deployment, for which we need Allied consent, are under attack in all of the five countries where they would be located. One basing country, The Netherlands, has deferred (it is cancellation in all but name). The Belgians have been unwilling to announce participation but are apparently ready to proceed. Chancellor Schmidt clings to German participation under extreme pressure from his own party. Italian participation continues with relatively little political opposition but mounting technical problems. Only the U.K. among the five basing states is reliably proceeding, but a change of government before the U.K. program is complete could very well lead to its termination.

The underlying problem in Europe is an apparently strong current of pacifist sentiment that seems to get worse. We have seen only the beginning of the demonstrations against the planned NATO deployment. The increasing involvement of church and civic groups in the opposition to new TNF in Europe, the amalgamation of the press and mounting political pressure within virtually all the governing coalitions in Europe have weakened the resolve of our Allies. Proponents of the NATO modernization are trimming, running for cover. In my judgment, without a new and dramatic initiative by the United States, the center cannot hold.

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U.S. negotiating options:

In these circumstances we are impaled on the horns of a dilemma. We are negotiating because our Allies will not support the modernization program unless we do so. But if the negotiations produce an agreement that is essentially cosmetic--an agreement that leaves the Soviet advantage in TNF largely undiminished--there would be strong pressure to abandon the planned NATO deployment as unnecessary. Thus the modernization program is threatened as much by what some might wrongly perceive as "success" in the negotiations as by a failure to negotiate.

A protracted stalemate in the negotiations would seem to be the condition most conducive to progress on modernization, provided that it resulted from a Soviet refusal to accept a U.S. proposal that captured the imagination of, and received strong support from, the broad public, especially in Europe. But the Soviets understand this as well as we do. And given the fact that they possess far more theater nuclear weapons than they need to attack all the high value targets in NATO Europe, they are well poised to open the talks with a deceptively generous offer to scale back on their SS-20 deployment.

Pentagon studies indicate that to achieve any significant reduction in the threat posed to NATO by Soviet TNF deployments we must obtain an agreement approaching the zero level of SS-20 (and related) missiles. There is thus a formidable convergence of what is militarily effective and politically sound. It is for this reason that I believe we ought to propose a draft treaty, at the outset of the negotiations, that would reduce to zero the number of theater nuclear missiles of greater than battlefield range in Europe and the Soviet Union.

The zero option:

In my judgment, a zero outcome proposal has a number of significant advantages.

First, it is sufficiently sweeping to offer some promise that it will capture the imagination of Europe. Moreover, it would enhance the image of the President as a man committed to significant reductions in nuclear weapons on a basis that is fair, equitable, verifiable and militarily stabilizing. Overnight it could make him a candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Second, it would put the Soviets immediately on the defensive. They would then be in the position of having to argue for TNF missiles in Europe--and any ceiling subsequently agreed to would have come about as the result of Soviet insistence.

Third, it would put our critics, particularly among the left in Europe, in an extremely awkward position. They would be compelled either to support us or to defend the notion (and the Soviet position)

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that we [illegible] nuclear missiles. While the more cynical among them might be prepared to criticize our proposal they would have difficulty persuading their more sincere followers of their opposition to the zero outcome.

Fourth, such a proposal, if accepted, would be significantly easier to verify than any ceiling that permitted some theater nuclear missiles to remain in inventories. One of our concerns, for example, is to be sure that the Soviets are not permitted to retain refire or reload missiles--because studies show that even severe limits on launchers have little or no effect if refire missiles are permitted. But this is extremely difficult to verify at any level other than zero.

Fifth, we would find it a good deal easier to cope with the political pressures that can be expected to attend a deadlock in the talks if the deadlock is brought about by Soviet refusal to accept a zero outcome. We would be entitled to don our white hats. But we must be prepared to stand by our advocacy for as long as it takes. We must not repeat the Carter Administration's mistake of 1977 when they abandoned a far-reaching SALT proposal after only six weeks.

Sixth, finally, it is really the right position to take. It is morally and, if we can get it agreed to, militarily right.

Opponents of this proposal may well argue that a willingness to abandon our plan to deploy 572 modernized systems in Europe in exchange for a Soviet willingness to dismantle their stronger or already deployed forces will only encourage our Allies to halt our own program before we secure Soviet agreement. I disagree.

The underlying logic of the zero option is well understood: if the Soviets abandon their deployment we will abandon ours; and, conversely, if they insist on retaining theirs, to which ours are a justified (if inadequate) response, then we must proceed. While well understood, this could be made a specific condition of our participation in the negotiations. By contrast, we have no reason to assume that our Allies will carry on with a partial deployment in the aftermath of an agreement that permits some number of TNF missiles on each side. I am afraid that, illogical as it might sound, if any such agreement were reached with the Soviets, many of our Allies would abandon the TNF program anyway.

But perhaps more importantly, our experience with arms control in the past suggests that the need to support our negotiating position by actually going ahead with our own programs is widely appreciated. At the height of the opposition to ABM deployments in the early days of the Nixon Administration, for example, the argument that prevailed in the Congress was precisely that. We cannot now expect the Soviets to dismantle deployed missiles in exchange for "paper airplanes." They will only do it if they genuinely fear we actually will deploy Pershing II's and ground

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launched cruise missiles against them. And withdrawal by our Allies from the modernization program in the midst of negotiations, with a highly defensible proposal on the table, would end any hope of an agreement. They will not assume that risk or bear that burden.

From some quarters we will undoubtedly hear the argument that the zero option is not "credible" or "serious." Credible and serious, in this context, means "negotiable," and it is largely the judgment of arms control experts that we must enter the talks with a proposal sufficiently close to the Soviet position to be negotiable. But no one who has studied the matter closely believes that we have sufficient leverage to obtain an agreement that serves our security interests if the terms approach those to which the Soviets would be readily responsive. In short, the USSR has 250 SS-20s deployed now and they are adding one new one per week.

I believe that the zero option is in the U.S. interest. It will certainly require skillful management of the negotiations to sustain support for this proposal (and the modernization program). But it is better to tackle the difficulties of selling a proposal that is in our interest than to fall back to one that is not on the doubtful grounds that it will prove easier to sell to others. In the end we must appeal over the heads of specialists and our critics to the larger public. If we move toward the Soviet position even before the talks begin we run a significant risk of emerging with an agreement that would be worse than none at all, such as a "generous" Soviet proposal to reduce their 250 SS-20s to 150--to our zero.

Summary:

I believe there is far more at stake than whether we succeed in getting through the negotiations with the December 1979 modernization intact.

There is great danger that the negotiations will lead to an agreement that entails only cosmetic cuts in Soviet forces while weakening further NATO's all too tenuous resolve to improve its military posture. At risk then would be not only NATO's TNF modernization program, but its defense budgets and conventional forces as well. If a cosmetic agreement were reached it would almost certainly dissipate further an already diminishing sense of danger--and the will to respond to it by redressing the military imbalance in the Soviet's favor that has been nearly a decade and a half in the making.

In these circumstances the easy assumption that the Soviets will resist reductions in their SS-20 force would be imprudent in the extreme. They just might propose such cuts in the belief that some SS-20s are surplus to their military needs and can therefore be expended to achieve important political gains. We have to remember that 150 (or some such number) of SS-20s to nothing, is

just as bad as the Soviet retention of 250 SS-2[redacted] to nothing. It is indeed probably worse--for it would mean acceptance of the 150 to zero with no NATO will left to redress that fatal total.

The implications of this are clear: if NATO is to protect its modernization program by putting the Soviets on the defensive and turning the harsh light of reality on the large Soviet advantage in theater nuclear weapons, our opening proposal must be dramatic; and it must anticipate probable Soviet responses with a view preserving the integrity of our position. Among the alternatives, the zero option is most likely to accomplish this purpose.